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The WPUS and the Great Strike, II: Chicago

In 1877, Chicago was the most important city in the Midwest. Its center was choked with railroads—the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern, the Baltimore & Ohio, the Chicago & Northwestern, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, the Rock Island, and the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago, to mention just a few—and on its fringes were a host of lumberyards and stockyards. On the ashes of the Great Fire of 1871, Chicago contractors had thrown up hundreds of factories, which drew thousands of workers and plunged them into the squalor and misery of tenement life. Discontent bubbled under the surface. As the depression continued, demonstrations of the unemployed grew more and more frequent, and in January 1875 it was seriously predicted that within the next decade, "a proletarian revolution" would occur in the Windy City.[1]

In the summer of 1877, well within the time set, it looked as if the prediction might come true, for as the strikes spread in the East, "a feverish feeling" began to take hold of Chicago. At first, the local newspapers dismissed the possibility of any strike in the city, but they soon acknowledged that Chicago's railroad workers, too, felt "hard" toward the railroads for cutting wages below family needs.

All the major newspapers expressed sympathy with the "genuine grievances" of the eastern railroad strikers—"substantial, honorable and reasonably intelligent men"—and the press bitterly attacked the grasping railroad corporations for bringing on the strike.[2] The *Chicago Times,* published by Victor L. Lawson, was most outspoken and, after criticizing the Baltimore & Ohio for paying its workers "a contemptible sum" even before the most recent 10 percent cut, said boldly that if the road could operate profitably only "by robbing the workingman, then we say it ought to be fenced in, and marked in ten-foot capitals: 'Closed, because the workingmen won't starve to death.'"[3]

Even while they affirmed their sympathy for the plight of the strikers, the Chicago newspapers expressed the fear that any local walkout would trigger a larger upheaval. "The fact that there are 15,000 unemployed in this city," worried the *Times,* "many of whom are desperate, is a sermon in itself."[4] But even aside from these public statements, even greater fears of an approaching riot were being expressed privately. "It is estimated we have thirty thousand idle men in Chicago," wired a local railroad manager. "There is much excitement here over the riots, and the sympathy is with the strikers, it being talked of on streetcars and in streets as a bread riot."[5]

By the weekend, rumors already were circulating in Chicago of open strike discussions among the city's eleven thousand railroad workers. That weekend, at formal meetings, these workers discussed the events in the East, along with their own grievances and the possibilities for strike action in Chicago. What most alarmed the newspapers was the appearance of Workingmen's Party leaders at the railroad workers' meetings. Albert R. Parsons, the brilliant, handsome, twenty-nine-year-old "moving spirit" of the Chicago socialists, attended a meeting of the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago railroad workers, and was loudly cheered when he urged an immediate railroad strike in support of the eastern strikers.

By Saturday, July 21, the Chicago sections of the WPUS had already begun to mobilize the city's workers. Several thousand working people gathered that afternoon at a WPUS street corner meeting

at Halsted and Twelfth streets, and that same afternoon the party's American section staged another large meeting in a packed Stack's Hall. ("The hall was crowded almost to suffocation," the *Tribune* report conceded.) John Schilling, the first speaker, endorsed the WPUS National Executive Committee's call to place the management of all railroads and telegraph lines in the hands of the government: "This would do away with railroad kings and monopolies generally, who draw princely salaries, and then plunder the people at their leisure." It would also, he predicted, do away with railroad strikes, and he cited as a precedent the fact that the post offices of the country had never known a strike: "This is because the Government knew what was necessary for the men to live upon." (It is doubtful if any post office employees in the audience would have agreed with this appraisal of the government's labor policies.)[6]

Albert Parsons then made a most forceful presentation of the socialist program. After being "uproariously cheered, showing his popularity," he launched into an attack on the country's newspapers, accusing them of being spokesmen for "monopolies and tyrants." He quoted scornfully from editorials in the *Chicago Tribune,* in which that paper upheld the principle that "the proprietor has a right to fix wages and say what labor is worth."[7] In that case, Parsons cried out angrily, "We are bound hand and foot—slaves, and we should be perfectly happy: content with a bowl of rice and a rat a week apiece."

Parsons insisted that Chicago's huge unemployment was the result of the indiscriminate introduction of new machinery by the capitalists. In seeking to maximize their profits, they were at the same time reducing the working people to vagrancy. Rather than oppose the new machinery, however, Parsons called for its responsible use. He maintained that workers deserved a large share of the benefits of new machinery, and argued that work could be shared and the unemployment problem solved by reducing the workday to eight hours.[8]

The "grave situation" in Chicago, particularly the enthusiastic response to the socialist speakers, and the news on Sunday that Pittsburgh crowds were burning the railroad yards, prompted Chicago's business leaders and city authorities to begin preparations for an

impending conflict. Local railroad managers began moving their rolling stock out of Chicago. Retail employers, like Field, Leiter & Co., started arming their employees; large manufacturers, like Cyrus McCormick, strengthened their factory guard force; and grain dealers organized protection for their stock. The newspapers, completely forgetting their earlier editorials about the justified grievances of the strikers, urged immediate military preparation: "Chicago must not fall into the hands of a mob."[9]

The authorities needed little prompting. With Pittsburgh in flames, and with workers beginning to meet in Chicago, the city authorities braced themselves. Mayor Monroe Heath and members of the city council met over the weekend with officials of the police department, the sheriff's office, and the fire department. Mayor Heath also met secretly with National Guard commanders and ordered them to prepare the two Chicago regiments and to keep all the armories under guard. Upon Heath's request, Secretary of War McCrary ordered six companies of the Twenty-second U.S. Infantry, on their way from Dakota to the East, to stop in Chicago.

By Monday, the newspapers were announcing the mobilization of Chicago's 450 policemen and 2,000 reservists in the two local regiments of the state militia. Arms were prepared and the armories were placed under guard. There was much speculation that the First Regiment—"the sons of capital"—would not be up to a conflict with workers, while the working class Second Regiment would be sympathetic to their brethren. Therefore, the announcement that the "Indian fighters" from the Dakota Territory were en route to Chicago produced some reassurance.[10]

After a weekend of rumors that the strike had already begun in Chicago, work resumed as usual on Monday morning. But a handbill was circulated calling for another Workingmen's Party mass meeting in the evening. The handbill began:

WORKINGMEN OF CHICAGO!
Have you no rights? No ambition?
No Manhood?

> Will you remain disunited, while your masters rob you of all your rights as well as the fruits of your labor? . . .

The leaflet went on to claim that vagrancy laws made the workers criminals for being unemployed, while workers' combinations for wage increases were illegal, and that now the "money lords" were conspiring to rob workers of the ballot. It urged workingmen to defend their "rights" and "manhood," for throughout the "entire land," workers were calling upon their brothers and sisters in Chicago "to rise and protect our labor." The appeal closed:

> For the sake of our wives and children, and our self-respect,
> LET US WAIT NO LONGER! ORGANIZE AT ONCE!
> Mass-Meeting on Market Street, near Madison, to-night.
> Let us act while there is yet time!
> THE COMMITTEE
> Workingmen's Party of the United States.[11]

That evening, as many as fifteen thousand members of the "Grand Army of Starvation," as they called themselves, gathered in response to the WPUS summons for a three-hour "monster affair" in the heart of Chicago's industrial district. Workers marched from various sections of the city, converging at the meeting place in torchlight processions. They carried placards in English, German, and French, reading: "Life by labor or death by fight"; "We want work not charity"; "Why does over-production cause starvation?" and "United we stand, divided we fall."[12]

The *Chicago Tribune*'s account of the great meeting began on a note of puzzlement. It conceded that it was an orderly meeting, attended by "respectable workingmen who deprecated attacks upon property." It then expressed surprise that such an orderly meeting could be held under the auspices of the socialists, "who, contrary to general expectation, counseled (at least openly) moderation, and deprecated any resort to violence." However, forgetting these introductory remarks, the reporter went on to describe the speeches

as "dangerous"—especially that of Albert Parsons, which, he said, "bordered upon the inflammatory."[13]

After saluting the "Grand Army of Starvation," Parsons hailed the strikers in the East. These men, he said, had "demanded of those who have possession of the means of production that they be permitted to live," and that they not be turned into "vagrants and tramps." While it was to be regretted that these men—"our distressed and suffering brothers" in the East—had had to "resort to such extreme measures," yet "we recognize the fact that they were driven to what they have done." Parsons denounced railroad magnates Scott, Gould, and Vanderbilt for forcing their employees to work for ninety cents a day and then expecting them to feed and clothe their wives and children and care for and educate their sons and daughters, "and to teach . . . [them] how to grow up to lead good and virtuous lives." After attacking the press for filling its columns with stories of sex and crime but never bothering "to go to the factories and workshops to see how the toiling millions give away their lives to the rich bosses of the country," he wound up:

> Let us fight for our wives and children, for with us it is a question of bread and meat. Let the grand army of labor say who shall fill the legislative halls of this country. . . . Go to the ballot-box, and say that the government of the United States shall be the possessors of all the railway lines in this country. If the people . . . take possession of the railroads and telegraphs, we extract the sting from the mouths of Jay Gould and Tom Scott, and they can no longer sting us to death. *(Loud applause.)* We take out of their hand the means by which they now enslave us. Let us not forget the fact that all wealth and civilization comes from labor alone. . . . It rests with you to say whether we shall allow the capitalist to go on exploiting us, or whether we shall organize ourselves. Will you organize? *(Cries of "We will.")* Well, then enroll your names in the grand army of labor, and if the capitalist engages in warfare against our rights, then we shall resist him with all the means that God has given us. *(Loud and prolonged applause.)*[14]

The resolutions adopted by the great meeting denounced the railroads for having steadily cut wages "until human nature can no longer suffer in silence." They charged that wage reductions, which were bad at all times, were, "especially during the present prostration of business, a direct injury to society," since as the purchasing power of the people was reduced, the volume of business was "proportionately decreased"; they urged that a reformed national government be created which would take over and operate the railroads and telegraph lines, "just as in the case of the principal railroads and telegraph lines of Europe." They also called

> . . . upon all comrades of toil to commence without further delay the organization of a great federation of labor, and assisting and encouraging the building up of strict and sensible trades unions upon a national and international basis, and aiming at political power to secure legislation in the direct interest of the working classes.
>
> Resolved, That only by elevating and improving the condition of the people as a whole can the benefits of progress and civilization be enjoyed and maintained.
>
> Resolved, That to this end the hours of labor must be reduced as new labor-saving machinery is developed, else the most terrible consequences will ensue, and the civilization of the nineteenth century become a farce.[15]

Speakers continued to address the audience from four wagons. All but one counseled militant but moderate action. The exception was John McAuliffe, who warned the militia not to fire at striking workers: "If they shoot us, we'll shoot them." As the crowd cheered wildly, Philip Van Patten got up and urged moderation. Finally, Parsons called for another rally on Tuesday evening, and the crowd retired peacefully.[16]

Later that night, the city authorities guaranteed reporters that Chicago's crisis had passed.[17] Actually, of course, it had only begun.

The Great Strike came to Chicago on Monday evening, just a few

hours after the WPUS meeting, when forty switchmen on the Michigan Central Railroad struck for more pay. Early the next morning, they brought out the workers from the Central's shops and freight yards, and together the strikers continued along the river to, in the words of one striker, "clean out the other monopolies."[18] They called out workers at the freight yards of the Baltimore & Ohio and Illinois Central. Then they staged a brief meeting at which they announced: "We hope to gain our rights, bread for our families, and a decent living for ourselves." After affirming their determination to halt all railroad traffic without violence, they left in several groups, one to the downtown freight yards along the lake and the river, and another to the railroad yards south along the river.

As the railroad workers and their supporters moved through the streets, they were cheered by onlookers in the working class neighborhoods. A banner announcing the WPUS meeting that night, carried by two of the workers, also brought cheers. Upon reaching the railroad yards and machine shops, small delegations were sent in, and the men at work proceeded to discuss the need to spread the strike. In most cases, they joined the railroad strikers, who then moved on to other establishments, chanting "Down with the Thieving Monopolies." The Excelsior Iron Works, the National Boiler Works, Greenbaum's Iron and Nail Works, and the Chicago Die and Machine Works all received visits and were put out of operation.[19]

"The Chicago Strikers Moving Over the City and Stopping Work Everywhere," the *Chicago Daily News* headline screamed the next day. Lumber yards, planing mills, brickyards, and packinghouses were visited and closed down by crowds chanting "We want Labor and Justice" and "Down with the Wages of Slavery." Twelve packinghouses, including Armour & Co., were compelled to sign an agreement to pay two dollars a day for the next eighteen months.[20]

As for the railroad strikers who had initiated this wide upheaval, they were careful to allow passenger trains to continue running, and sought only to halt freight traffic. The railroad companies made no attempt to resist the crowds, and several closed down before the

deputations arrived. By nightfall, all freight traffic was at a halt in Chicago.[21]

From the beginning, then, the Great Strike in Chicago was obviously more than just a railroad strike. The Chicago police historian, John Flynn, caught the spirit and sweep of the uprising, even though he could not fully understand the years of discontent that had triggered the "labor explosion":

> All through the afternoon . . . strikes were in progress from the lake to Western Avenue; from the North Side rolling mills to the town of Lake. The disposition or propensity to strike became a mania. Workingmen who had no earthly cause to complain, who could not call to mind a grievance, threw down their tools, tore off their "overalls," snatched up their coats and hats, shook their clenched fist at their employers, and joined the nearest mob. The railroad employees, the lumber shovers, the saw and planing mill men, the iron workers, the brass finishers, the carpenters, the bricklayers, the stonemasons, the furniture makers, the polishers, the shoemakers, the tailors, the painters, glaziers, butchers, bakers, candle stick makers—all went out without motive or reason, and helped to swell the crazy mobs that paraded endlessly through the streets.[22]

The crowds ranged in size from a few hundred to a few thousand, and they were reported to be composed of women and children as well as workingmen. There were a few reports of pillaging, and there were rumors of attempts to loot gun stores; but mostly the action of the crowds forced work stoppages. Although armed with sticks and stones, the crowds dispersed without resistance upon encountering small bands of police. "No Bloodshed in the City," the *Times* reported.[23]

By mid-afternoon, most work in Chicago had come to a halt. Dispatches from the city to the nation's press bore the headlines: "The Strike General in Chicago."[24]

During the entire day, individual members of the Workingmen's

Party had been actively encouraging the strikers. In the morning, Thomas Morgan, a leading party member, was selected as spokesman and negotiator for the striking Illinois Central workers. Morgan urged the strikers to join the WPUS, and he successfully advanced strike demands for higher wages and shorter hours, although the strikers refused his plea to include the nationalization of the railroads as part of their strike demands. George Schilling, another party leader, was instrumental in organizing a strike among his coworkers, the coopers, while other socialists helped initiate strikes among the lumber shovers and cabinetmakers.[25] Late that Tuesday evening, over fifty trades delegates—American, German, Irish, and Scandinavian—gathered with WPUS leaders at Aurora Hall. They recommended the drawing up of citywide strike demands for the eight-hour workday and 20 percent wage increases. They then established a permanent executive committee to conduct the strike, and called for a Wednesday afternoon meeting of delegates from all shops, factories, and trade unions "to lay out a plan how to work and better our situation."[26]

In the meantime, it was essential that the strikes be led in an organized manner. "Fellow Workers," the WPUS appealed, "Under any circumstances keep quiet until we have given the present crisis a due consideration."[27] But this plea made little impression on the press or the authorities. Either despite or because of the socialists' attempt to channel the uprising into a disciplined citywide general strike, the newspapers accused them of fomenting crowd violence. "The different crowds moving about the city today closing factories were committees of the Commune," the *Daily News* charged.[28]

Next came the harassment. Charles A. Dana, the publisher of the *New York Sun,* had made no comment to John Swinton, the editor, when the latter came to work the day after speaking at the Tompkins Square meeting called by the New York Workingmen's Party.[29] But Albert R. Parsons, a printer on the *Chicago Times,* was not so lucky.

Parsons had been the subject of a brief editorial on the same day that the *Times* reported his speech at the Market Square meeting:

"His name is Parsons. Until very recently he was a 'rat' printer. He joined the Typographical Union while running for Alderman in the last election. Now he is leading the commune. A model workingman truly!"[30] The meaning of the editorial became clear the very next morning, when Parsons reported to work as usual. He was immediately fired by the foreman of the composing room and blacklisted in his trade. That afternoon, he was taken by police to City Hall and ushered into the presence of the superintendent of police and several members of the board of trade. The superintendent insultingly asked Parsons questions about his life. He blamed him "for the great trouble" he had brought on the city of Chicago and charged him with inciting "the working people to insurrection." As Parsons noted later in his autobiography (written while he was in prison in 1887, awaiting execution in the Haymarket frame-up):[31]

> I told him I had done nothing of the sort at least I had not intended to do so, that I was simply a speaker at the meeting that was all. I told him that the strike arose from causes over which I, as an individual, had no control. Those present in the room were much excited and when I was through explaining some spoke up and said "hang him," "lynch him," "lock him up," etc., to my great surprise holding me responsible for the strikes in the city. Others said it would never do to hang me or lock me up. That the working men were excited and that act might cause them to do violence. It was agreed to let me go.

After two hours, the superintendent of police let Parsons go, but as he pushed him to the door, he snapped:

> Parsons, your life is in danger. I advise you to leave the city at once. Beware. Everything you say or do is made known to me. I have men on your track to shadow you. Do you know you are liable to be assassinated any moment on the street? . . . Why, those board of trade men would as leave hang you to a lamp post as not.[32]

That same afternoon, Mayor Heath issued a proclamation closing all saloons and ordered the fire bells rung, summoning the militia to their armories. Veterans' clubs and military companies of all nationalities were mobilized, and the mayor recruited several thousand "men of high standing" as special police, after a prominent citizen offered to pay for them. Citizens brought guns and ammunition to City Hall while businessmen loaned horses for new cavalry companies. Despite assurances that six companies of the Twenty-second U.S. Infantry were en route, and that six more companies of the Ninth Infantry were moving from Omaha to Rock Island, the mayor also urged the "better class of citizens" to begin organizing for self-defense in their wards and communities. The morning papers of July 25 reported a booming business at the gun stores, with sales restricted to the wealthy class, which was alarmed over the size, character, and implications of the work stoppages: "The whole town was aroused either for defensive or offensive purposes, and Chicago presented the appearance of a city in a state of siege."[33]

The morning papers reported another ominous development. The previous evening, the WPUS gathering of five thousand workers was broken up by a wedge of police firing blank cartridges and swinging clubs. "The Abortive Meeting: The Police Take a Hand," the *Tribune* reported gleefully, as it detailed the fact that "half a dozen heads were broken, most of them the heads of unoffending individuals."[34] It was obvious that the Chicago police were spoiling for a fight.

For its part, the Workingmen's Party was trying almost desperately to avoid violence. When Philip Van Patten was called to the central police station on the morning of July 25 to be given the "Parsons treatment," he disavowed any connection with crowd violence, and reaffirmed the socialists' desire for peace. That afternoon, the party issued the following proclamation:

> WORKINGMEN OF CHICAGO!
>
> The success of our honest effort to increase wages depends entirely upon your good conduct and peaceful though firm be-

> havior. We hereby declare that any riotous action in our meetings will be immediately put down by us. The grand principles of Humanity and Popular Sovereignty need no violence to sustain them. For the sake of the Cause which we hold most dear, let every honest workingman help us to preserve order. Let us show the world that with all our grievances and misery we can still act like men and good citizens.[35]

In contrast to the WPUS, the city authorities and the wealthy classes armed for war. Meeting in special session, the Common Council announced that there existed in Chicago "a rebellion against lawful authority," and authorized Heath to make any expenditures he deemed necessary for the preservation of peace. It also called upon all good citizens to enroll as special police to aid "in suppressing the rebellion." That afternoon, at a large citizens' meeting in Moody and Sankey Tabernacle, Mayor Heath put out a call for five thousand "good and experienced citizens" as volunteers, and Reverend Robert Collyner endorsed the call with an appeal that they fight to the death "in defense of order and our homes." Immediately after the meeting, the police force was augmented by volunteers. Two hundred veterans were organized into companies, furnished with Springfield breechloading rifles and forty rounds of ammunition each, and stationed at the armory on Harrison Street. The North Side Germans organized a cavalry squadron of one hundred mounts. Two companies of the Twenty-second U.S. Artillery arrived, and four hundred men of the First Regiment of the Illinois National Guard sweated impatiently in their armory. "They mean business," the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* assured the city's middle class.[36]

Meanwhile, a frantic Common Council, acknowledging that "thousands of workingmen are idle in the city of Chicago at the present time, whose families are suffering," enacted the legislation they had claimed was impossible for four years, which allowed the city to borrow half a million dollars for construction projects to provide more work.[37]

Early in the evening of Wednesday, July 25, the first serious clash

occurred between the strikers and their sympathizers and the police. A crowd of several thousand working people, railroad strikers, and neighboring residents gathered at the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy switchyards on West Sixteenth Street, probably to check whether the work stoppage was being observed there and to make sure that the company was not sneaking out any trains. Once satisfied, the crowd began to trickle home. Just then, an omnibus rattled up, and eighteen policemen piled out with their revolvers drawn. The police charged the crowd with their revolvers blazing, and a slow retreat began, which turned into a rout. By this time, thousands of working people had spilled out into the streets around Halsted Street. Some joined the crowd, while others stoned railroad buildings, ditched locomotives and railroad cars, halted streetcars, and broke into a gun store and a local hardware store. The police were driven to the Halsted Street viaduct over the railroad tracks, and at one point they were surrounded, but they were reinforced by another carload of police, then another, and bullets started to fly into the crowd again. After it was all over, three persons were reported dead and eight wounded—all members of the crowd.[38]

An hour later, two miles to the north, the Workingmen's Party held another outdoor meeting, at Market and Madison streets, which was well attended and had an abundant supply of banners. Van Patten presided, but no sooner did he open his mouth than a squad of police attacked the audience from behind and clubbed it into a stampede. Van Patten and the speakers' stand were both bowled over. At this point, a regiment of one thousand torch-waving, drum-beating workers marched up, prepared to hear the WPUS speakers, but the police immediately fired a warning volley into the air and threatened to lower their aim unless the workers dispersed immediately. The crowd swiftly did so, but not without some open resistance from the assembled workers.[39] However, this was only a prelude to the major action, for on Thursday the police would meet a crowd that really offered resistance.

Meanwhile, Mayor Heath had decided to seek federal help; he appealed to Governor Shelby Cullom, who formally requested mili-

tary assistance from President Hayes. On Thursday morning, the president authorized General R.C. Drum, of the Division of the Missouri, to use six companies of the Ninth Infantry, then stationed at nearby Rock Island, to help Heath in case of trouble.[40]

At the same time, local forces were being prepared. Albert Day, a prominent grain merchant, recalled the feeling of all "that the worst had not come," and their fears that "the mob" would attack "the best residence sections of the city." Day attended a citizens' meeting of the Eighteenth Ward where prominent bankers, merchants, and lawyers were sworn in as special police. They elected their own officers and were given U.S. Army muskets. These neighborhood citizen military defense organizations were formed in at least half of the city's wards, under the leadership of such "solid citizens" as Wirt Dexter and Marshall Field, as protection against "stray strikers and tramps." After sporadic efforts at standing guard, Day's company actually stood guard duty during Wednesday night, July 25; and early Thursday morning, they reported to police headquarters as citizen reinforcements.[41]

By that time, Chicago's forces of "law and order" were fully mobilized. Railroads like the Illinois Central and the Chicago & Northwestern, business houses, lumber yards, and manufacturers had organized their trusted employees into armed companies to protect their property. Private militia companies, veterans' organizations, newly formed citizens' cavalry companies, ward patrols, and special police—all were prepared to support the local police, the state militia, and the United States Army. Over twenty thousand men were under arms, with six companies of the Ninth Infantry now en route from Rock Island. They awaited the impending conflict in the spirit voiced by the *Inter-Ocean:* "Squelch them out, stamp them out, sweep them out with grapeshot."[42]

The crowds re-formed on Tuesday morning, continuing the citywide forced work stoppages of the previous day. But by now, a new mood was in evidence. Up to this point, as the *Tribune* noted, there had been a "holiday" spirit in "the mob," which expressed itself in a feeling of "jocularity."[43] But as the police became more

aggressive, and the authorities, joined by the upper and middle classes, prepared for civil warfare, the mood of the crowds changed from a festive spirit to one of fury at the police tactics against the crowds. The use of guns by the police on Wednesday in the breaking up of a peaceful WPUS meeting enraged many workers. And the large number of "citizens" acting as special police, who were reported to be quick to club and shoot, only served to sharpen these tensions.

This new mood quickly manifested itself. Although dozens of crowds across the city continued to enforce the work stoppages on Thursday, the viaduct at Halsted and Sixteenth streets became a focal point for a massed conflict between the working people and the representatives of law and order. The location of the battle was not accidental, for the viaduct not only spanned the tracks and rolling stock of several railroad lines, but it was also adjacent to the lumber district. This was the neighborhood that had spawned a bloody lumber shovers' strike in 1876, and that had been at the center of the upheaval in the southwestern part of the city for the past two days, including the pitched battle of the previous evening.

The battle started early in the morning when a crowd began cutting telegraph wires and stopping streetcars near the viaduct. A police squad arrived, and the battle was on. The police broke up the crowd, but it soon re-formed. More police were sent, and soon the conflict was joined and fought with sticks and stones, clubs and guns. Using their clubs, the police drove the crowd over the Halsted Street viaduct and down the slope onto Sixteenth Street. There, another crowd, numbering about five thousand, came to the rescue of its advance guard. The police fled back to the viaduct and, having decided to make a stand, whipped out their revolvers and started firing into the crowd. Six men dropped in their tracks, but the crowd pushed nearer. With most of their ammunition gone, the police turned and fled. Then more police arrived, plus a company of mounted militia. The original squad fell in behind, and a fierce charge followed, with the police clubbing and shooting. This time, the crowd turned and fled south on Halsted, then on Archer Av-

enue. The police clattered after them in hot pursuit, clubbing and shooting as they went. Federal troops were called in and the Second Regiment also marched in, flying the American flag and a Fenian banner with "the harp of Ireland," and bringing along two ten-pound guns.[44]

No sooner did the riot near Halsted and Sixteenth streets end than another started at Halsted and Twelfth streets. A portion of the Sixteenth Street crowd ran down to Twelfth Street and tried to merge into a small crowd standing outside of Turner Hall, on the corner of Twelfth and Halsted streets. Inside the hall, several hundred German socialist cabinetmakers of the Harmonia Association of Joiners were gathered to discuss their strike and the eight-hour day. The meeting spilled out into the street just as a squad of regular and special police reinforcements arrived. The latter made no inquiries about the purpose of the assemblage; instead they unmercifully and viciously attacked the crowd outside and crashed through the doors. When the proprietor of the hall protested, a Sergeant Householder split his head open with a club and ordered his men to attack everyone in sight. The police opened fire and clubbed people at random, killing one and wounding several others, and driving the panic-stricken workingmen into a heap on the floor, tumbling down the stairs, and jumping through the windows into the street. (They "ran hither and thither like rats in a pit," the *Chicago Tribune* reported.) One man was pinned to the top of a table, while two policemen took turns beating him. Outside, a Sergeant Brennan shot indiscriminately at passers-by and at men running out of the hall. When the police had finished, the Second Regiment arrived and, with bayonets drawn, drove everyone in the neighborhood, including women and children, into their houses.[45]

The battle raged on through the morning, especially along Halsted and Twelfth streets, near the viaduct at Sixteenth Street, and at the bridge near Archer Avenue. Thousands of working people milled and massed in the streets, with smaller groups among them taunting the troops and actually engaging them with guns, sticks, and stones. Despite gunfire and repeated charges, the crowds would

not disperse, and the authorities continued to send reinforcements into the area. And from midmorning on, as news and rumors of the Halsted Street battle spread, working people from across the city began massing there.

One of the most remarkable and revealing—or, as the *Tribune* put it "one of the most terrible, audacious, and unreasonable" events of the day was a march by several thousand Irish packinghouse workers down Archer Avenue toward Halsted Street and the conflict at the viaduct. The appearance of the Irish butchers had been rumored since Wednesday night, and now they marched along Archer Avenue, wielding butchers knives "to cut their way through any obstacle to their march," as well as the customary street weapons. They closed lumber yards and other businesses, and forced employers to raise wages. Preceded by two Irish butchers carrying a banner proclaiming "Workingmen's Rights," they made an awe-inspiring sight. ("They were men in every sense of the word . . . were brave and daring, and scattered terror in their way," the *Tribune* reporter wrote.) When they reached the bridge that crossed over the river branch to Halsted Street, they were met by the police, along with a large crowd of wildly cheering Czech workers, and other "demonstrations of sympathy." Although the Irish butchers were eventually routed by the police, the tumultuous greeting they received showed the effect of the Great Strike in eradicating ethnic differences among the workers. The tensions between Irish and Czech workers, as sharp as any in the city, suddenly became irrelevant in the common battle against the police, the authorities, and the "respectable citizens." The newspapers took note of this startling development among working people, "who ordinarily draw the line of nationality in making up their gangs."[46]

The papers also pointed out that sexual differences, too, were overcome in the heat of the struggle. "It is a noticeable fact," reported the *Times* the next day, "to all who have taken more than a casual view of the crowd of 'strikers' that at least one-fifth of the gathering were women." The *Tribune,* in fact, gave the women credit for most of the crowd activity, and charged that "the women had

been exciting the men to action throughout the morning." "The women," the paper concluded, "are a great deal worse than the men."[47]

However, it was the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*'s account of the role of women in the crowd action that aroused nationwide attention, and was reprinted in newspapers the country over. Headed "Women's Warfare: Bohemian Amazons Rival The Men In Deeds of Violence," the account told of how, when groups of men in the crowd became "thoroughly demoralized," "hundreds of these Amazons" rushed to replace them. It continued:

> Women with babes in arms joined the enraged female rioters. The streets were fluttering with calico of all shades and shapes. Hundreds were bareheaded, their disheveled locks streaming in the wind. Many were shoeless. Some were young, scarcely women in age, and not at all in appearances. Dresses were tucked up around the waist, revealing large underthings. Open busts were common as a barber's chair. Brawny, sunburnt arms brandished clubs. Knotty hands held rocks and sticks and wooden blocks. Female yells, shrill as a curfew's cry, filled the air. The swarthy features of the Bohemian women were more horrible to look at in that scene than their men in the Halsted Street riots. The unsexed mob of female incendiaries rushed to the fence and yards of Goss & Phillips' Manufacturing company. The consternation which this attack created extended to Twenty-second Street, at that hour very quiet. A crowd of men gathered on Fisk Street to witness this curious repetition of the scenes of the Paris commune. The fence surrounding the yard gave way, and was carried off by the petticoated plunderers in their unbridled rage.[48] There was fear for a while that the Amazonian army would continue their depradations. Word was dispatched to the Himmon Street Station, and a force of officers under Lieutenant Vesey pushed down to the corner of the contest. The women hissed as they saw the blue coats march along. Some of the less valorous took to their heels. . . . Others stood their ground.

> A shower of missiles greeted the boys as they came smiling along left front into line. One woman pitched a couple of blocks at the heads of the officers, and then moved on to attend to her family duties. The men were weak in the strength and forcefulness of their language compared to these female wretches. Profanity the most foul rolled easily off their tongues with horrid glibness. Expressions were made use of that brought the blood mantling to the cheek of the worst-hardened men in the crowds of spectators. It was awful. . . .

The police finally drove the women off with their clubs and revolvers, but they remained in the area, threatening any man who said he was "not in sympathy with the mob," and joining women of other nationalities in caring for the wounded. As fast as any man was injured, he was taken into some house in the vicinity, "and the women being in strong sympathy with and doing all in their power to aid the rioters, they would not say whether they had any wounded in the house or not." The *Chicago Inter-Ocean* viewed the unprecedentedly large number of women involved in the crowd action, and their militancy, as "the most disgusting revelation that has yet deepened the already black record of riot and villainy which for nearly a week has disgraced the fair name of Chicago."[49]

Another feature of the events of Thursday was the guerrilla warfare that developed after large crowds were broken up by the charges and firepower of the police and troops. (As the *Tribune* put it, "when the mob was defeated, guerrilla war was established.") Smaller groups and crowds of working people continued the battle, skirmishing, fighting on the run, charging and retreating, coalescing into crowds and fragmenting into small groups, using the friendly neighborhoods and the homes of sympathetic women as protection for the ongoing struggle. The crowds fought on through the afternoon, using the alleys, streets, rooftops, fields, and narrow passageways of the area for safety. While the police and troops were refused water in these working class neighborhoods, the workers who darted into buildings and homes for refuge were welcomed. Finally, the ex-

hausted police ordered all windows and doors shut and all rooftops cleared, as they slowly established control.[50]

The victory of the forces of law and order was insured by the arrival of the six companies of the Ninth U.S. Infantry, which President Hayes had ordered in from Rock Island, and of two more companies of the Twenty-second U.S. Artillery, from Dakota. To make certain, however, Mayor Heath swore in two thousand more special police, organized more citizens' companies, and had over four hundred demonstrators arrested.[51]

By Friday, July 27, the Battle of Chicago was over. There were still a few skirmishes around the city, especially in the "notorious neighborhood called Hamburg," at Halsted and Thirty-fifth streets, where "a fighting class" of butchers and railroad and rolling mill workers continued to occupy the streets. The end of the battle also left a residue of strikes by streetcar workers, stonecutters, lumber shovers, coopers, harness makers, iron moulders, cigarmakers, switchmen, and ship carpenters. Although the city's corporation counsel acknowledged a distinction between trade unionists and rioters, he insisted that "violent agitators" controlled any meetings that took place, and the police thereupon prohibited all meetings.[52]

That weekend, Chicago was quiet, but the fighting had cost the city eighteen lives. As funerals were held on Sunday for those workers killed during the riots, the resentment in working class neighborhoods was so much in evidence that police, citizens, and troops continued to patrol the streets.[53]

Although it was apparent to anyone who read the detailed accounts of the great battle of July 26 that the Workingmen's Party of the United States had had nothing to do with the events, all of the Chicago papers blamed the party for the rioting. "Red Rabble Routed," alliterated the *Inter-Ocean* the following day.[54] "The Fight with the Communists is at an End," the *Tribune* headlined on Saturday.[55] During the events, the *Times* reported all the details under the title of "Red War."[56]

In the thriller he wrote about the 1877 strikes, Allan Pinkerton blamed the Chicago rioting of July 26 on the "ranting of a young

American communist named Parsons."[57] But the truth is that Parsons and other leaders of the Workingmen's Party had tried to *restrain* the crowds, but had lost complete control of the workers, who were enraged by the calculated brutality of the police. It was the police who deliberately inflamed the situation when they broke up a peaceful meeting of the Workingmen's Party and invaded a peaceful meeting of furniture workers, spreading death and destruction. An enraged *Daily News* reporter called such police "a uniformed mob."[58] The cabinetmakers later preferred charges against Sergeants Householder and Brennan for their brutal conduct. The judge found the sergeants guilty of provoking a "criminal riot," and fined them six cents each![59]